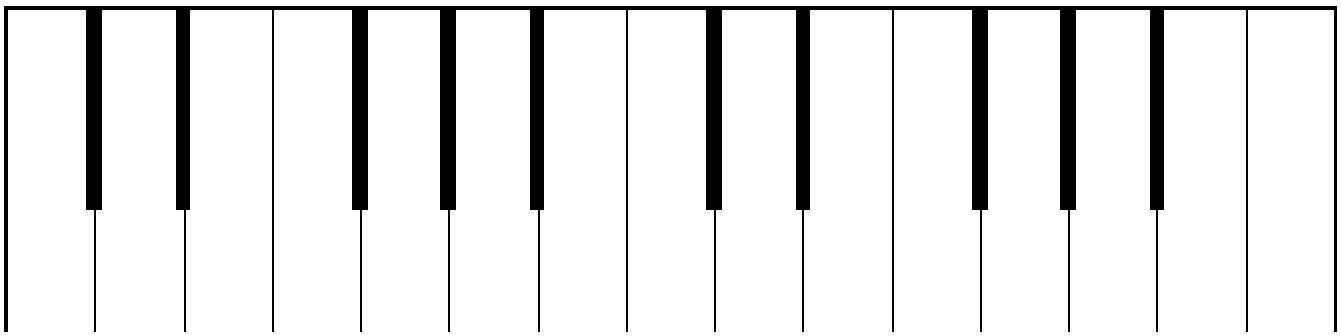
SCALE & SCRIPTURE

Circle of Fifths Practice Plan



Circle of Fifths Practice Plan

Mastering the Circle of Fifths, for transposition, scale fluency, and chord skills

How This Plan Works

This is a 4-week plan built around one idea: the circle of fifths isn't just a chart to memorize, it's a map you can play through. Each week moves one step further around the circle, so your hands learn the key relationships the same way your eyes learn to read them. Every session follows the same five-block routine, so you always know what you're doing and why; only the specific keys change week to week.

Sessions are designed for 30–40 minutes a day, 5–6 days a week. If you have less time, keep all five blocks but shorten each one rather than cutting a block entirely. Consistency across all five skills matters more than depth in any one.

Daily Practice Routine

Run through these five blocks in order, every session:

Block	Time	Focus
1. Warm-up	5 min	Hanon or slow finger-independence exercise in the key of the day, both hands, to settle the hands before key-specific work.
2. Circle of Fifths Scales	8 min	Play major and relative minor scales in circle order (not alphabetically), hands together, 2 octaves, moving one key further around the circle each day.
3. Transposition Drill	10 min	Take a short phrase (4–8 bars) and transpose it live into 2–3 neighboring keys on the circle, using the circle to predict the new key signature before you play.
4. Chord Progression by Fifths	8 min	Play a ii–V–I (or I–IV–V) progression in the key of the day, then walk it around the circle one key at a time.
5. Repertoire Application	7 min	Apply the day's key to a piece or lead sheet you're learning: either play it in its written key with fresh key-signature awareness, or transpose a section into the day's key.

4-Week Progression

Each week adds one more step clockwise and one more step counter-clockwise around the circle, so you build outward from C in both directions (sharps and flats) at the same pace.

Week	Keys in Focus	Goal
Week 1	C, G, F (0, 1#, 1b)	Get comfortable with the routine. Play scales hands together at a slow, even tempo. Transpose short phrases between C and its two nearest neighbors.
Week 2	D, Bb (2#, 2b)	Extend one more step each direction. Start timing your key-signature recall: you should be able to state the signature before playing.
Week 3	A, Eb (3#, 3b)	Introduce transposition on the spot with no written reference: play a phrase from memory, then move it into that day's key by ear plus circle logic.
Week 4	E, Ab, plus review (4#, 4b)	Consolidate: play the full scale ladder around the entire circle in one pass, then pick two random keys and transpose a repertoire excerpt between them.

After Week 4, repeat the cycle starting from B/Db (5#/5b) through F#/Gb at the bottom of the circle, using the same weekly structure.

Core Exercises, Explained

1. The Scale Ladder

Play major scales in circle order (C, G, D, A, E, B, F#, Db, Ab, Eb, Bb, F) rather than alphabetically. This order matches how key signatures actually build on one another, so your hands learn the pattern of "one more sharp" or "one more flat" instead of twelve unrelated shapes. Follow each major scale immediately with its relative minor (found just inside the circle) before moving to the next key.

2. ii–V–I Around the Circle

In the key of the day, play the ii chord, then V, then I (for example in C: Dm → G7 → C). Once it's comfortable, shift the whole progression to the next key clockwise on the circle and play it again, without stopping. This trains your ear and hands to follow harmonic motion by fifths, which is how a huge amount of real chord progressions actually move.

3. Transposition Drill

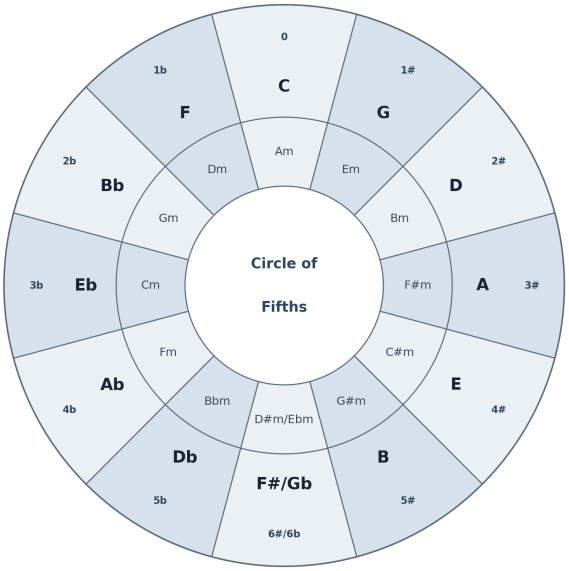
Pick a short phrase you know well. Before playing it in a new key, use the circle to find the distance: count the steps between the original key and the target key to know how many sharps or flats you're adding or removing, and in which direction. Say the new key signature out loud, then play the phrase. Start with neighboring keys (one step away) and gradually work up to keys three or four steps away.

4. Progression by Fifths

Play a I–IV–V progression, then notice that IV and V are simply your key's two immediate neighbors on the circle. Practice building progressions purely by looking at neighboring positions on the circle, so you internalize why certain chords feel like "home," "departure," and "tension" relative to a given key.

Quick Reference: The Circle of Fifths

Major keys sit on the outer ring, their relative minors just inside, and the sharp/flat count is marked on the rim.



Outer ring: major key | Inner ring: relative minor | Outermost label: sharps (#) / flats (b)

Practice Log

Print this page, or copy the table, and fill it in after each session to track your progress through the plan.

Date	Key of Day	Scale (min)	Transposition (from → to)	Chords Done	Notes

Date	Key of Day	Scale (min)	Transposition (from → to)	Chords Done	Notes

Tips for Staying Consistent

- Keep sessions short but daily rather than long and occasional: five minutes of transposition drill every day builds the skill faster than one long session per week.
- Say the key signature out loud before you play it. Verbalizing forces the recall to become explicit instead of guesswork.
- When a transposition feels hard, name the interval and the direction first before touching the keys.
- Revisit Week 1 keys periodically even after moving on. The goal is retention across the whole circle, not just progress through it once.